

POPE JOHN PAUL II- POLAND'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

The celebrations in Ottawa to mark the canonization of John Paul II

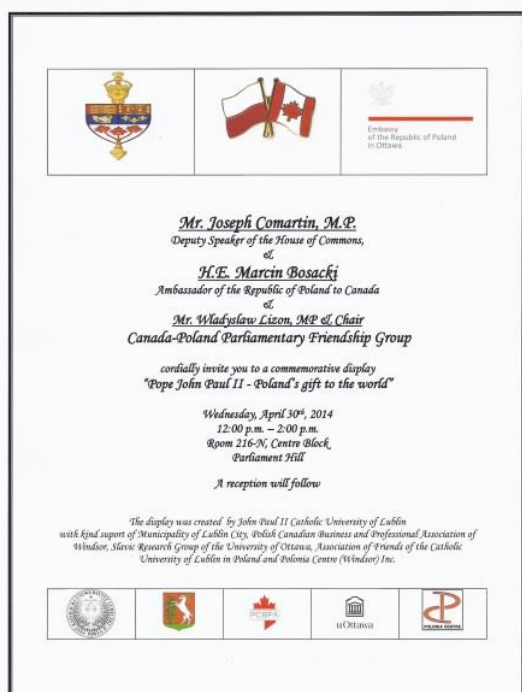
On Sunday, April 27, 2014, in St. Peter's Square, Rome, there was the canonization of two Popes, John Paul II and John XXIII, with the participation of the two living Popes, Francis and the retired Benedict XVI. More than one million of the faithful and close to 100 national delegations took part in the canonization. Among them was a delegation from Canada, which included a Member of Parliament of Polish origin, Mr. Władysław Lizoń.

For 26 years, Pope John Paul II was for all of us the highest authority of the Roman Catholic Church in the world. The legacy that remains after him is unimaginably great, both in amount and in quality. It is very difficult to present it in any condensed form. However, representatives of the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), where Karol Wojtyła was a Professor of Ethics for 24 years, succeeded in doing so in an exhibition, titled "Pope John Paul II- Poland's Gift to the World".

KUL very carefully compiled the graphics of the exhibition, including the unique photographs by Grzegorz Gałązka. It is noteworthy that the patrons of the exhibition are distinguished people, including the Speaker of the Polish Senate, the Metropolitans of Kraków and Lublin, the Mayor of Lublin, and the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Canada.

The exhibition originated as an initiative of Jerzy Barycki, President of the Polish-Canadian Business and Professional Association of Windsor, who for several years has been the promoter and coordinator in the creation of various interesting exhibitions, such as "The Odyssey of the Wawel Treasures 1939-1961" and "Sir C.S. Gzowski", which were shown in the Parliament last year.

After a meeting at KUL, on January 9, 2014, where there was agreement on the preparation of an exhibition about John Paul II for Canada, the Polish-Canadian Business and Professional Association of Windsor offered financial support. Shortly afterwards, Professor Richard Sokołowski, of the University of Ottawa, added his professional help and after three months the exhibition was completed, with beautiful graphic design and in three languages, Polish, English and French.



The opening of the exhibition took place on April 30, 2014, at the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa, in the elegant Parliament Room 216N, located not far from the famous Library of Parliament. The exhibition on the legacy, left by our Pope, was exceptionally beautiful and moving. It is noteworthy that Members of Parliament from all political parties visited the exhibition. The Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons, Joe Comartin, coordinated and helped to organize this celebration, so important to Polonia, Poland and Canada. His collaborators were Marcin Bosacki, the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Ottawa and Władysław Lizoń, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Polish-Canadian Parliamentary Friendship Group. The meeting was opened and chaired by Joe Comartin, who already is well known to Polonia. Among the distinguished guests were Andrew Scheer, Speaker of the House of Commons; Minister Advisor Jarosław Kurek, representing the Polish Ambassador, who was not in Canada; and Katarzyna Bosacka, the wife of the Polish Ambassador.



In spite of having to attend a meeting of Cabinet Ministers not long after, also present were ministers, who are well known to Polonia, the Hon. Chris Alexander and the Hon. Jason Kenney, who is a particular friend to the Polish community. A delegation from the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, newly arrived from Poland, took part and included Prof. Dr. Urszula Paprocka-Piotrowska and Anna Tarnowska-Waszak, Director of the KUL Open University. In fact, these individuals, together with several other representatives of KUL, created this remarkably interesting exhibition in electronic form, so that it later could be printed on 12 panels (digital graphics) in Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

People always needed role models to copy. They also need them now, in our times, marked by changing and opposing ideas (JP II).

We must interpret the challenge, **“Be not afraid!” (JP II)**, in a very broad manner. In a certain sense, it was a challenge, aimed at all people, the challenge of becoming accustomed to fear in the global context of the modern world, in the East the same as in the West, the North and the South. From the very beginning, it was said that the Pope is particularly interested in the problems of a human being: instead of eating alone, he preferred to dine in the company of others and listen to what other people had to say. Instead of holding a Mass in the presence of only a chaplain, he preferred to invite the faithful to it. Perhaps the popularity of the Holy Father comes from the fact that almost everyone felt noticed by him. The Pope did not wish to leave anyone out: he visited the White House and Harlem (an Afro-American district), Wall Street and the Bronx (a Latin-American district) he met with the rich and the poor, Christians and Jews, and as the press wrote, **“he hugged children ...even though he did not need any electoral votes ...”**. The world looked with admiration at John Paul II.

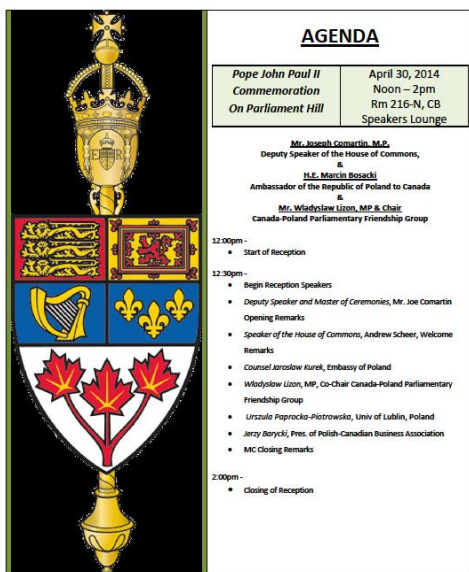
At UNESCO, the Pope paid tribute to the nations, to societies, which above all culture unites. **“I am the son of a nation, which has lived the greatest experience of history, which its neighbours condemned to death several times, but which has survived and remained itself. It has kept its identity and it has kept, in spite of partitions and foreign occupations, its national sovereignty, not by relying on the resources of physical power, but solely by relying on its culture. This culture turned out in the circumstances to be more powerful than all other forces” (JP II).**

John Paul II attached great importance to signs. He frequently saw them, where others noticed nothing. Spiritual attire also had the range of an important sign. There is a well known anecdote about a certain prelate, who arrived for an audience with the Holy Father in a black jacket. “I see,” said the Pope, “that you have put in your cassock for dry cleaning.”

John Paul II saw in Canada many cultures and many nationalities forming it; of great importance was a meeting with Ukrainian immigrants, belonging to the Greek Catholic Church, to whom the Bishop of Rome said that he saw in them a bridge between the Christian East and the Christian West. In the opinion of the Pope, **“A multitude of national traditions, cultures, histories and identities lends itself to recognition of the unity of society.”** John Paul II showed Canadians just such a Canada, multicultural and united around Evangelism. Thanks to this visit, Bishop John Sherlock later said, “They could discover their country and their history all over again. This means that they saw it in a new perspective, they began to understand one another, they began to understand that that beyond cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity, there are elements that unite much deeper, than those that divide. It was an eloquent discovery of unity ...”.

The number of journeys of John Paul II abroad long ago had ceased to surprise anyone and even became the subject of jokes. For example, What is the difference between God and the Pope? God is everywhere and the Pope has already been there ...

Andrzej Kloczkowski, a Dominican, remembers this about John: “During my last visit to Rome, I asked the Pope, Holy Father, what will happen during the meeting between the three great religions, planned for the year 2000? Will the Christians, Muslims and Jews appear on Mount Sinai? The Pope replied, Don’t philosophize. Pray.”



The official programme for the exhibition included a number of short speeches. Here are a few quotations from them.

“... we are very pleased that because of our partnership, we could honour the canonization and life of Pope John Paul II ...”

Joe Comartin, Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons of the Canadian Parliament.

“... John Paul II could find a common language with young people all over the world ...”

“... this was a great man and a great Pope ...”

Andrea Scheer, Speaker of the House of Commons of the Canadian Parliament.



“... I hope that the motion by Władysław Lizoń, establishing John Paul II Day in Canada, will be passed in the Senate the same way that it was passed in the House of Commons ...”

Jarosław Kurek, Minister Advisor, Embassy of the Republic of Poland

“... it was an amazing inspiration, which John Paul II presented to the people ... something happened, which we felt, rather than understood and which led to the creation of the free independent workers’ unions, Solidarity, and in effect to complete changes in this part of Eastern and Central Europe ...”

Władysław Lizoń, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Canada-Poland Friendship Group



“... the twelve panels presently before us represent only a small part of the pontificate of John Paul II, which he left us- the Pope from a faraway country, was a pilgrim, a university professor, a defender of public rights and freedom, a proponent of international dialogue, a friend of young people and families, a sensitive father – close for the poor and suffering ... I shall leave you the pleasure of discovering this in a moment ...”

Urszula Paprocka-Piotrowska, Senior Vice President, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

“... when I left Poland in 1981, I never imagined that I would see her free in my lifetime and yet it happened in 1989. Not only Poland, but other countries in Eastern Europe also gained their freedom and we know that in this there is a big contribution by our Pope John Paul II ...”

Jerzy Barycki, President, Polish Canadian Business and Professional Association of Windsor



It is not possible to sum up the greatness of John Paul II. He belonged intimately to each one of us and in meetings with him, through his words, through his prayers, one met him and continually discovered him anew. Sometimes from a meeting there remained one movement ... a glance ... a small gesture, which held the whole world inside. To live in the generation of John Paul II was a great joy. To meet in a lifetime the Holy Father, John Paul II, was an enormous gift. Many millions of people met him. Their happiness, rapture, emotion ... did not change ... but live on. The presence of John Paul II in this generation was a great favour, a spiritual power. John Paul II showed us the way to enter the third millennium.

The world describes John Paul II with many different titles. One might think of John Paul II as “the Pope of the Sick” ... he understood this very well. Twice he was close to death. Once, in wartime, in 1943, when a German army vehicle hit him and knocked him down unconscious ... and the second time ... in an assassination attempt on May 13, 1981.

... The plane carrying the Holy Father landed punctually in Alaska. The greeting proceeded according to a programme that had been planned in detail and was strictly followed. At a certain moment, the Holy Father noticed a group of sick people and some Poles ... a short while after, the television commentator said: “Now the whole programme very likely will change, because the Holy Father just saw a group of sick people and some Poles.”

Indeed, the Pope stayed a long time with the two groups ... for that was his love. Just as Poland was his Homeland, so too were the sick his special strength, which he would feel with every beat of his heart. When he was with the sick, when he would embrace them, when he would tend to their needs ... then he was only with them and for them. And it is sometimes hard for us to come to terms with suffering, which is a great mystery in the life of a human being. An individual afflicted with pain understandably would like to feel the close, physical presence of another person, helping him through the pain, understanding him, sharing with him feeling and thought. Sometimes the other person is a relative, a friend, a priest. The presence of any one of them, the feeling of sympathy and understanding can bring relief to the suffering person. Along with these individuals of good will, Pope John Paul II stood in his prayers by the side of each suffering person.



The Hon. Jason Kenney viewed each panel of the exhibition, accompanied by Dr. Urszula Paprocka-Piotrowska, a Professor at KUL. The professor briefly commented on the message contained in each of the panels. At the panel, “In Family Circle”, showing a moving meeting of the Pope with children and sick people, Minister Jason Kenney lingered for a longer time ... it seemed as though he wanted to be on his own with Pope John Paul II and his children ... for a moment there were tears in the eyes of the Minister ... his face showed that he was visibly moved ...



On the day of the canonization of John Paul II, after the conclusion of the Liturgy of Holy Mass at the Saint Maximilian Kolbe in Mississauga, Minister Jason Kenney spoke. In a speech of passion, broken by applause in a confirmation of faith, the Minister, who was converted thanks to John Paul II, recalled his presence at the funeral ceremony for the Polish Pope, in which he participated as part of a government delegation to Rome in 2005. He spoke of his impressions, when in 1978 as a young person he watched a transmission of the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła at the Vatican. He also emphasized the great significance of the first visit of John Paul II to Poland in 1979. During the speech ... the Minister was very moved ... Minister Jason Kenney is truly a worthy individual for Canada and her people.

“... Children very quickly understand life. They observe and imitate the behaviour of adults. They quickly learn love and respect for others, but they also easily fall prey to the venom of violence and hatred. That, which they experience in the family, very strongly flows to the foundation, which they adopt as adults. Parents have an unusual opportunity to show their children the great value that is in witnessing their mutual love. Loving, they allow their child from the very beginning of his existence, growing up in an atmosphere of peace, characterised by positive elements, which form the true heritage of the family, namely: mutual respect and acceptance, openness to others, doing good, impartiality, forgiveness ...” (JP II).

A pleasant surprise for our guests from KUL was some help from the office of Minister Jason Kenney in gaining entry to “Question Period” in the House of Commons. They were able to see with their own eyes and hear a debate by representatives in our Parliament. It just so happened that our representative, Władysław Lizoń, had occasion to ask Minister Jason Kenney, When will the Senate pass Bill 72, John Paul II Day, for all of Canada? From the response, it was clear that unfortunately up to that time the Senate had not resolved the matter. As we all know, this had been going on for several months. There still is no recommendation from the Senate Commission, which deals with this matter. This is a great pity, since the Province of Ontario proclaimed April 2 as John Paul II Day in March of this year. The canonization already took place on April 27, 2014, and it would be a wonderful addition to this celebration, if all of Canada were able to mark John Paul II Day once a year.



The exhibition, John Paul II, made a big impression on its viewers. Already there are requests for the exhibition from many parts of Canada and even from Detroit (USA). Organizations interested in getting the exhibition on loan should contact the Embassy of the Republic of Poland, in Ottawa.

John Paul II the Great, as he was named by the newspaper, *The New York Times*, left behind a legacy that is great. In addition, after the canonization, he is for all of us Saint John Paul II, the most famous son of the Polish Nation. For this reason, the name of the exhibition, Pope John Paul II- Poland's Gift to the World, is particularly meaningful to Poland and Polonia.

Text: Anna Ronij, selection of photographs Jerzy Barycki.
English translation: Frank Simpson.

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